

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

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NPS Form 10-900

USD/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

445-447-449 South Rampart St., Orleans Parish, LA

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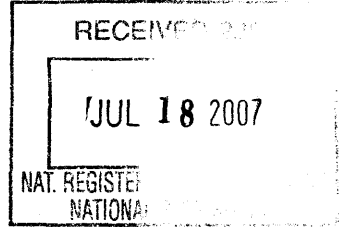
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: 445-447-449 South Rampart

Other Name/Site Number:



2. LOCATION

Street & Number 445-447-449 South Rampart

Not for publication: NA

City/Town New Orleans

Vicinity: NA

State: Louisiana Code: LA County: Orleans Code: 071

Zip Code: 70112

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Nationally: Statewide: Locally: X

Signature of Certifying Official/Title Jonathan Fricker, Deputy SHPO, Dept of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

Date June 18, 2007

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official/Title

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

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4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register
Determined eligible for the National Register
Determined not eligible for the National Register
Removed from the National Register
Other (explain):

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

5. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property
Private: X
Public-Local:
Public-State:
Public-Federal:

Category of Property
Building(s): X
District:
Site:
Structure:
Object:

Number of Resources within Property
Contributing
3
3

Non contributing
buildings
sites
structures
objects
0 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 0

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: NA

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: commercial Sub: restaurant; specialty store
Current: vacant Sub:

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: Italianate

Materials:

Foundation: brick
Walls: stucco; brick
Roof: other: asphalt
Other:

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

Numbers 445, 447 and 449 South Rampart Street combine to form a continuous commercial block in the Italianate style. The two story brick buildings were originally constructed as terrace houses in 1889. Despite a long history of conversion and alterations, the buildings still convey enough of their appearance to represent the once-thriving commercial scene on South Rampart Street (see Part 8).

The present three party-wall commercial buildings were constructed as part of a continuous row of five terrace houses with balconies and rear service wings. Except for 439 Rampart (now lost), each had a three-bay façade. They featured a continuous roofline of modest pitch that formed a hip where it turned the corner at the intersection of Rampart Street and Poydras. Sanborn maps show a fire wall extending eighteen inches above the roof between #445 and its (now lost) neighbor and a fire wall of the same height at the end of the five units. These took the form of gabled parapets. The roof had a generous overhang featuring Italianate brackets with ball drops. The soffits of the eaves had recessed panels and regularly spaced decorative cast iron vents. In keeping with the Italianate style, the buildings featured regularly spaced segmentally arched openings with pronounced keystones.

Very early in their history the houses were converted for commercial use below with residences above. This is borne out by a 1908 Sanborn map that lists the buildings as shops, as well as city directories from the first few years of the twentieth century. The conversion entailed the installation of commercial shopfronts on the first story with plate glass windows and decorative cast iron columns. The paneled columns featured a roundel at mid point and stylized leaf-form capitals.

In the ensuing years there were more changes, as one would expect of a set of buildings in a thriving central business district in heavy commercial use. The balconies were removed, the buildings were stuccoed over and some of the windows on the Poydras Street elevation were removed. At #449, the Italianate cast iron shopfront was removed and a transomed corner entrance was installed (corner of Rampart and Poydras).

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Few clues exist as to when the last mentioned changes were made. In fact, there are only two. A 1940 Sanborn Map shows the buildings with most of the balconies gone. Only #447 (in the middle of the present three) is shown retaining its front balcony. A 1949 photograph shows all front balconies gone as well as the other changes noted above.

Since the close of the historic period (1957), two of the original five buildings have been lost (#s 441 & 439). The surviving three are presently in the early stages of a rehabilitation project. (The developer hopes to take advantage of the Register tax credit.) When the present developer arrived on the scene the cast-iron columns referenced above were all that remained of the shopfronts. The areas between the columns were either boarded over or filled-in with new shopfront treatments. The upper floor window openings were also boarded over (windows long gone). Three dormers on the South Rampart elevation and one on Poydras had been added as part of a failed rehabilitation project (different developer). The interiors of all three buildings had been gutted, with exposed brick walls and rows of studs where interior walls once were.

At present (February 27, 2007) the building is open to view at the South Rampart street ground level. The newer infill between the cast-iron columns has been removed. Visible in the gutted space are cast iron columns and exposed brick walls. Upstairs is stripped down to the studs. The stucco on most of the South Rampart upper level has been removed, revealing the brick. Window frames are in place on the upper story, but with no glass. The Italianate brackets have been removed for repair and reinstallation. Previously the side elevation of #445 (originally a party wall) had a modern metal gable. This has been removed and a gabled parapet is being installed.

Assessment of Integrity

The candidates admittedly have suffered various losses and modifications over the decades. And the recently added dormers do detract from their architectural character. Nonetheless, the three buildings are still readily identifiable as late Italianate masonry party wall structures. Even with the alterations, someone from the historic period would recognize the buildings today. (See Part 8. The buildings are being nominated for historical significance.)

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Applicable National
Register Criteria:

A X B C D

Criteria Considerations
(Exceptions): NA

A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance: commerce

Period(s) of Significance: c.1905-1957

Significant Dates: NA

Significant Person(s): NA

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: unknown

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

The party wall buildings at 445-449 South Rampart are locally significant within the context of New Orleans' African-American history as rare survivors to represent a once flourishing entertainment/business district which stretched for several blocks along South Rampart, from roughly Canal to Howard. Sadly, the area today is one of surface parking lots, and in some stretches, modern buildings. There are about a dozen historic buildings remaining, sprinkled here and there. Most of these are vacant and have been threatened with demolition over the years. Collectively and individually these buildings have survived against considerable odds. The period of significance for this nomination spans from c.1905, the date of conversion to commercial use at the ground level, to the current fifty year cutoff of 1957. (South Rampart's decline as a commercial and entertainment hub began in the late 1950s/early '60s.)

Historic Context:

In the first half of the twentieth century, South Rampart Street was a happening place lined with drugstores, saloons, barber shops, clubs (live music venues), combination grocery stores/saloons, second-hand stores, pawn shops, etc. Seniors who knew South Rampart first-hand in its heyday used phrases like "hub of black life," or "main street for blacks in New Orleans" when interviewed. One man remarked, "It had everything we needed." In an era of rigid segregation South Rampart was the home of three hotels – the Astoria, the Patterson, and the Page, plus a few rooming houses. (None of the hotels survive.) The Astoria had a cocktail lounge, a restaurant, a gambling hall in the back, and a legendary club, the Tic-Toc, upstairs. (Various greats played the Tic-Toc during the historic period, including Ray Charles and Louis Armstrong.) And as can be imagined, a street with so many entertainment venues and saloons had its share of characters. Interviewees recall "Overall Bill" and "Alabama Slim" – both of whom earned their living gambling.

South Rampart was part of "back of town," one of the city's most important neighborhoods in the development of early jazz. Immortalized with the 1930s tune "South Rampart Street Parade," the several block long strip was the fairly respectable edge of so-called "black Storyville," a neighborhood immediately to the rear known for its brothels, honkytonks, and violence. The other commercial hub for the city's large African-American population was just upriver, along Dryades Street. But each occupied a special niche. If you wanted manufactured clothes and furniture, you went to the large stores (some chains) along Dryades. South Rampart businesses were more varied and tended to be small mom-and-pop places. The street was particularly known for its numerous tailor shops and entertainment venues. Having a custom-made suit was particularly important – it was a sign that you had "made it," so-to-speak. In contrast to the welcoming environment along Dryades and South Rampart, blacks could make purchases in the large "white" stores along Canal (then the city's principal shopping street), but typically they could not try anything on.

A New Orleans television producer, in a recent retrospective piece, capsulized South Rampart's importance thusly: "They came to shop, they came to promenade, they came dressed up, but for whatever reason they came to South Rampart Street. It was their Canal (shopping) and their Bourbon (entertainment)." The "they" were mostly African-Americans with a healthy mixture of Jews, Italians and Chinese. Many Jews were proprietors of South Rampart's tailor shops and pawn shops. (The latter, known as "loan offices" and/or "pledge shops," were the favorite haunts of musicians who pawned their instruments between gigs.) Grocery stores tended to be owned and/or operated by Italians.

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An important component of South Rampart's clientele was the "excursion" crowd (as they were termed by interviewees). These were people from nearby rural areas who were drawn like magnets to South Rampart on Friday evening and Saturday, typically arriving by train or bus, and often staying the night in a hotel or rooming house. For country folks coming to town took on a holiday air. As one observer noted, referring to the crowds, "You couldn't get on this street (South Rampart) on Friday evening and Saturday."

Like other traditional shopping areas, South Rampart's decline began in the late 1950s/early '60s. Add to this general trend the street's location on the edge of the New Orleans CBD, making it a natural for parking. The surface parking mania was fueled with the destruction in the late 1950s of "black Storyville" for a municipal complex and other government buildings. Today, of the over 100 brick party wall buildings that once lined a several block stretch, only about a dozen remain, scattered here and there. And, as noted above, almost all are vacant and periodically threatened with outright demolition. Demolition by neglect is a constant. The greatest concentration of historic buildings easily is the block where the candidates are located, where there are three others (interrupted by vacant lots where buildings once stood and modern construction).

445-49 South Rampart

The ground floors of 445, 447 and 449 South Rampart were used over the years for some of the street's "signature" businesses. A saloon, or honky tonk, occupied the corner address, 449 South Rampart, from 1900 to Prohibition. According to the oral tradition, live music, including early jazz, was played at 449 South Rampart. By 1926, a loan office was there. A photo from 1949 shows 449 South Rampart to be the home of a bar called "Pete's Blue Heaven."

445 and 447 South Rampart underwent various commercial uses characteristic of South Rampart, including, at one time or another, a second hand store, a hardware store, tailor shop and shoe store. The above referenced 1949 photo shows a beauty salon and shaving parlor at 447 South Rampart. (445 is not shown in the image.)

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Sanborn maps, 1896, 1908, 1940.

New Orleans City Directories, various years in historic period.

New Orleans Historic District Landmarks Commission Report, 445-449 South Rampart.

1949 photos, Historic New Orleans Collection.

Interviews conducted by Donna Fricker, Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation, with James Nelson, Lawrence Sanders, and Albert Fall (Battiste), all of whom experienced South Rampart in its heyday.

Simmons, Corbett, producer. "Music of South Rampart St." This short documentary, in two segments, appeared on WYES-TV in New Orleans. It is replete with vintage photos and interviews depicting the heyday of South Rampart as an entertainment/commercial mecca.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): NA

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- Previously Listed in the National Register. (partially)
- Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
- Designated a National Historic Landmark.
- Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #
- Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other (Specify Repository):

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: less than an acre

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	15	782320	3316740

Verbal Boundary Description: Lots A, B & C, Block 297, District 1, City of New Orleans

Boundary Justification: Boundaries follow property lines of lots historically associated with buildings.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: National Register Staff, Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation

Address: P. O. Box 44247, Baton Rouge, LA 70804

Telephone: 25-342-8160

Date: February 2007

PROPERTY OWNERS

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